

When Your Wireline Telephone Company Files for Bankruptcy

The fact that a wireline telephone company has filed for bankruptcy protection does not mean it will stop providing service. Many companies continue to provide uninterrupted service to their customers while in bankruptcy.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has the following regulations in place to protect consumers if a company wants to discontinue or reduce telephone services:

- FCC rules prohibit abrupt cut-off of subscribers' telephone service.
- FCC rules require a telephone company to provide written notice to affected customers of any planned discontinuance of service. The notice must specifically state the customer has the right to file comments with the FCC.
- After notifying affected customers, a telephone company must file for permission from the FCC to cut off service. Once the FCC receives this request, the FCC releases a notice to the public seeking comment on the request.
- The telephone company is not permitted to terminate service until a minimum of 31 days after the FCC releases its notice informing the public about the proposed action. The FCC can extend the termination date.
- For international telephone service, customers must receive 60 days' notice before their service is terminated. The telephone company must also file a copy of the notice with the FCC on or after the date affected customers are notified.

The FCC normally authorizes a telephone company's request to discontinue or reduce services unless the company's customers are unable to receive similar services or a reasonable substitute from another telephone company.

Sometimes during bankruptcy proceedings, a telephone company may sell or transfer its customer base to another company. If that happens, consumers are protected by FCC regulations as follows:

- The new telephone company must provide the customer 30 days advance notice of the transfer, including information about its rates and services.
- The customer may accept the new company or choose another company (but a customer who has signed a long-term contract may have to pay a penalty to choose another company; the customer should check the contract).
- A customer who is transferred to a new company without adequate notice is entitled to relief under the FCC's slamming rules. (For more information about slamming, visit the FCC's Web site, www.fcc.gov/slamming.)



State law may offer additional protections. Consumers should contact their state public utility commission for additional information. The address of your state public utility commission may be found in your local telephone directory under "government" or on the Internet at:
www.naruc.org/resources/state.shtml.

If Your Wireline Carrier Seeks to Discontinue Service

If you are a customer of a wireline telephone company that has sought FCC approval to discontinue or reduce telephone service and you have objections to the proposed action, you may file your objections and/or comments with the FCC. The FCC will issue a public notice announcing when such comments are due and where to send them. The FCC will consider your comments and/or objections when evaluating your telephone company's request to discontinue or reduce its services.

Complaints

If you have a concern or a complaint about your telephone company, you may make an inquiry or file a complaint with the FCC by e-mail (fccinfo@fcc.gov); the Internet (<http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/complaintfiling.html>); telephone 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice; 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY, or by mail.

Your complaint letter should include:

- name, address, and telephone number where you can be reached during the business day;
- the telephone number involved in the complaint;
- as much specific information about the complaint as possible;
- a description of the steps you took to resolve the complaint;
- the names and telephone numbers of the company employees you talked with in an effort to resolve the complaint and the dates you talked with these employees;
- copies of bills listing the disputed charges (circle the disputed charges on the copy of the bill); and
- the relief that you are requesting (such as an adjustment of charges).

If filing your complaint by mail, send it to:

Federal Communications Commission
Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

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To receive information on this and other FCC consumer topics through the Commission's electronic subscriber service, click on www.fcc.gov/cgb/emailservice.html.

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